



Bader International Study Centre

Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight

**Review by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

March 2012

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Bader International Study Centre. The review took place on 13 March 2012 and was conducted by a panel, as follows:

- Professor Debbie Lockton
- Dr David Gale
- Mrs Rebecca Ditchburn.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's delegated responsibilities for the management of academic standards and the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities
- draw a conclusion about whether the provider's public information is reliable
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. The context in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 5. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx) and its mission.¹ More information about this review method can be found in the [published handbook](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx).²

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at Bader International Study Centre (BISC), both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the visit of the review itself. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgements about Bader International Study Centre.

The panel concluded that it has:

- **confidence** that Bader International Study Centre is managing its responsibilities with respect to academic standards
- **confidence** that Bader International Study Centre is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

Conclusion about public information

The QAA panel concluded that:

- **reliance** can be placed on the public information that Bader International Study Centre supplies about itself.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **feature of good practice** at Bader International Study Centre:

- the level and openness of engagement between senior management and the student community, and its contribution to the management of the student experience (paragraph 2.3).

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to Bader International Study Centre.

It is **advisable** for Bader International Study Centre to:

- respond to and learn from external reviews, for instance the review of teaching by the Queen's Centre for Teaching and Learning (paragraph 2.4).

It is **desirable** for Bader International Study Centre to:

- continue to embed and monitor the introduction of grade descriptors and the grading scheme to aid consistency in assessment and student understanding of expectations (paragraph 1.6)
- continue to embed and implement the range of new initiatives introduced by BISC, for example the Curriculum Committee (paragraphs 1.7, 1.9 and 2.15)
- formalise arrangements for the support of students with English as a second language and capture good practice (paragraph 2.12)

- improve the communication and coordination of opportunities for developing independent learning and study skills at all stages of students' studies at BISC (paragraph 2.13)
- take a proactive role in communicating with Queen's University in respect of information about BISC held on websites so that out-of-date information is promptly removed (paragraph 3.1).

Context

The Bader International Study Centre (BISC) at Herstmonceux, Sussex was established as an affiliated campus of Queen's University (Queen's) in Ontario, Canada in 1994. It offers study abroad programmes in a residential setting both for Queen's and non-Queen's students. Students attending one of the Canadian University Study Abroad Program (CUSAP) partner institutions in Canada can apply to attend BISC for their entire first year. There are also options to apply for the Upper Year Program either through CUSAP or other partner institutions. All students are recruited through Queen's. They must already be enrolled for a bachelor's degree with honours and have a letter of permission from their home institution. BISC does not award its own degrees and students gain credit to an award of Queen's or their home institution. Programmes include a mixture of academic and field studies, with an emphasis on 'international studies', in accordance with BISC's ethos and vision of its benefactors, Doctors Alfred and Isabel Bader.

BISC is a charitable trust with a board of trustees which plays a key role in the oversight of its management. The Board is chaired by the Provost of Queen's. BISC's Executive Director is directly responsible to the Provost for the ongoing management of the Centre, including the quality of the academic experience at BISC. At the time of the scrutiny visit the current Executive Director had been in post for eight months, and had introduced a number of changes in the management of academic standards and quality, some of which were still in the process of being implemented.

Definitions of what constitutes a bachelor's degree with honours are set by Queen's, whose awards are in turn set by the Provincial Government of Ontario. Queen's complies with the Quality Assurance Framework of the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. Queen's own quality assurance processes set the specifications for appropriate learning outcomes by qualifications. BISC is responsible for the quality of the academic experience while students are in the UK, which includes maintaining the quality of the assessment processes.

A new memorandum of understanding covering quality assurance and procedures for oversight between Queen's and BISC was in the process of being written at the time of the scrutiny visit. The respective responsibilities of Queen's and its partner covering the period of study at BISC are clearly specified in study abroad agreements.

Detailed findings

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 Responsibility for establishing frameworks for academic standards and infrastructure rests with Queen's, and BISC is therefore subject to Queen's quality assurance arrangements.

1.2 Assessment is carried out in line with Queen's practice and Queen's also has an oversight role in monitoring assessment at BISC. All marks from BISC are sent to the relevant department in Queen's where they are checked, as they are considered as provisional until released by Queen's. In addition, the Executive Director receives all mark sheets before their transmission to Queen's to ensure that there are no discrepancies.

1.3 Queen's defines the assessment criteria including class participation and word limits for assessments. These details, along with learning outcomes, attendance policy and grade descriptors, are contained in a syllabus template, which has recently been developed by BISC in consultation with Queen's. These provide detailed guidance for students including detailed grade descriptors. The newly formed Curriculum Committee has reviewed a number of syllabuses and has noted some discrepancies. As a result, faculty are in the process of ensuring better standardisation of syllabuses.

1.4 BISC has no role in programme approval or module standards which are set by Queen's. However, BISC can suggest new modules which may be unique to BISC. Such modules must go through Queen's school level processes before they can be offered. Any new modules proposed by BISC would in the past, after discussion, be put forward by the Executive Director. In the future such proposals will be reviewed first by the new Curriculum Committee. After internal consideration, consultation takes place with the departmental chair and review committees at Queen's. Approval for the module must also be given by the Associate Dean (International) in the Faculty of Arts and Science before it is offered. Teaching staff confirmed that a similarly rigorous process occurred when making changes to modules.

1.5 Classroom observation is carried out by the Executive Director and the Assistant Academic Director to ensure that academic standards are maintained. While it is not an established practice at Queen's, it has recently been introduced at BISC to support new and established faculty. Visiting staff from Queen's also observe teaching (see also paragraph 2.4).

1.6 BISC staff regularly discuss timeliness and clarity of feedback for students. Teaching staff aim to return marked work within two weeks. The students felt that the feedback and marking at BISC was fair and transparent and that they could always approach staff for further feedback. They were also aware of the grade descriptors and how grades were translated into letter grades and grade point averages. The students did, however, note that, given the international staff and student profile at BISC, there could be inconsistencies in the interpretation of the descriptors. The scrutiny panel feel that it is desirable for BISC to continue to embed and monitor the introduction of grade descriptors and grading scheme to aid consistency in assessment and student understanding of expectations.

1.7 BISC undertakes module evaluations using the Queen's module questionnaire, University Survey of Student Assessment of Teaching (USAT). BISC plans to introduce a further faculty evaluation to go with USAT in order to collect more relevant information. At present module evaluations are considered by the Executive Director, however, the scrutiny panel were told that these would in future be considered by the Curriculum Committee as it continued to develop its role. The panel encourages faculty to continue to develop a template to standardise the information it requires.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.8 Up until now BISC's key reference points have been the requirements of Queen's. BISC recognises it should review and evaluate its own work in a wider context and include a wider range of external reference points. As a result, an effort has been made to circulate material and information from other sources. BISC is also in the process of considering how its provision relates to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Some staff are already aware of the Academic Infrastructure through faculty meetings, and through experience of teaching at UK institutions and their interaction with the University of Sussex.

1.9 BISC acknowledges the need for stronger and clearer institutional frameworks for the deliberative monitoring of academic standards, including involvement by teaching staff and external advisers. The scrutiny panel encourages these initiatives and considers it desirable for BISC to continue to embed and implement the range of new initiatives it has introduced, for example the Curriculum Committee.

The panel concludes that it has **confidence** in Bader International Study Centre's management of its responsibilities with respect to academic standards.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 BISC states that it aims 'to provide and manage locally the learning opportunities which we make available to students here in the UK, within general Queen's guidelines and oversight'. BISC is a small organisation and has no separate central deliberative body which is responsible for quality. There is an informal faculty meeting structure and oversight is by the Executive Director and the Senior Operations Team, which includes the Operations Director, Finance Manager, and Student Services Manager. The Queen's learning and teaching strategy informs learning opportunities at BISC and this is overseen at BISC by the Senior Operations Team.

2.2 BISC reacts quickly to issues raised by students or staff. The ability to call special meetings of the Board means that BISC can respond promptly to more complex issues that need Board approval. Students find staff very helpful and approachable and feel that they are part of 'a family'. Students can raise issues informally or through the Student Council. Students also contributed to the scrutiny visit by providing a student written submission prior to the visit which the panel found informative and helpful.

2.3 BISC has recently introduced 'town hall meetings'. These are open both to staff and students and are a forum for raising and discussing issues. An annual Student Submission to the Board of Trustees has recently been instigated alongside ongoing student evaluations. This will form the basis of an 'Annual Review Day' by the Senior Management

Team as part of the process of improving the quality of learning opportunities. To help reinforce a sense of 'international community', BISC has 'language tables' once a week in the refectory. These comprise of a table where only a particular language can be used throughout the lunchtime. The scrutiny panel felt that the level and openness of engagement between senior management and the student community contributed to the management of the student experience and was a feature of good practice.

2.4 A report of a teaching and learning review of BISC conducted by Queen's in March 2008 indicated that there had been previous visits by staff of Queen's library and Centre for Teaching and Learning to support BISC and to work with BISC staff 'to enhance the classroom experience'. The report contained detailed recommendations both for Queen's and BISC. Two specific recommendations for BISC included a faculty-designated Teaching and Learning Liaison, and the development and maintenance of a BISC-specific teaching and learning website housed on the BISC webpages. In addition, the report also recommended that a peer mentoring/buddy programme be devised, including peer observation of teaching. Although mentoring and peer observation were introduced in early 2012, the formal recommendations do not appear to have been adopted. Given that BISC wishes to map itself against external benchmarks, such as the Quality Code, the scrutiny panel feel that it is advisable for BISC to respond to and learn from external reviews, for instance the review of teaching by the Queen's Centre for Teaching and Learning.

How effectively are external reference points used in monitoring and evaluation processes?

2.5 Queen's sets down general standards and frameworks, including targets for IT and the library. Queen's establishes the quality of learning opportunities in a number of ways. Queen's Senate establishes the general framework and guidelines, and the Provost of Queen's is chair of the BISC Board of Trustees and has a monitoring role covering budget, strategic direction, and quality control of the BISC provision. Visits by deans and staff from Queen's provide an opportunity to check on specific aspects of learning opportunities, and regular emails between staff at both sites provide the means for day-to-day communication. In the last two years some BISC staff have visited Queen's.

2.6 BISC is drafting a new mission statement and has had a Student Charter since August 2011. Both these documents are held as key reference points within the overall framework for policy development and institutional responsibilities. The scrutiny panel did note that students appeared to be unaware of the Student Charter. BISC intends to use the annual Student Submission to the Board of Trustees, plus student evaluations, to form the basis of an Annual Review Day in April by Senior Operations Team to review performance.

2.7 Central oversight of learning opportunities lies with the Senior Operations Team. In addition, ad hoc groups may be established to deal with specific issues. The newly formed Curriculum Committee is beginning to formally oversee the quality of learning opportunities as they relate to curriculum and delivery. In addition, BISC is a member of a number of organisations and associations whose publications and guidelines form reference points for some aspects of their activities.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.8 BISC uses USAT and BISC evaluation forms, representations from the Student Council, comments from alumni, and comments from staff from partner institutions that place students at BISC to assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced. At present, student evaluations of courses are considered by the Executive Director. Any issues raised in relation to learning opportunities are responded to promptly

where possible. In addition, the newly formed Curriculum Committee intends to expand its remit to include student evaluations to will allow a more strategic overview of student evaluations and BISC's response to them.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that students are appropriately supported?

2.9 Queen's provide an all-day orientation event for parents and students prior to leaving their home country. While some students were unable to attend, they did not feel disadvantaged, as the prior information they had received was comprehensive. On arrival at BISC there is a five-day orientation/induction which students felt was very informative and helpful. Students felt that this preparation along with the size and closeness of the community at BISC made the transition from high school to BISC easier than going straight from high school to university.

2.10 The residential setting of BISC provides opportunities for formal and informal support in person, by email and through day-to-day interactions. Faculty operate 'office hours' but may also be in residence. Additional support is provided by student life coordinators (SLCs) who are graduates or postgraduate students resident at BISC. SLCs report to the Student Services Manager, and are responsible for, among other things, organising life skills programming and student activities, and providing informal non-professional advice and support to students. Students seen by the scrutiny panel felt that the idea of student life coordinators was good, but in practice there was a 'disconnect' between SLCs and students and this was an area that BISC could consider improving.

2.11 The USAT forms specifically ask questions in respect of the availability of staff outside of formal class hours to support students, and whether staff show concern for students and their needs. In addition, an overview report of student evaluations is produced and has led to improvements in student services, library provision and other aspects of learning opportunities via reviews by the Senior Operations Team. This overview report looks at student satisfaction in relation to academic counselling, student services and personal counselling. The report indicates that student satisfaction in the large majority of areas is very high.

2.12 BISC provides study support in various ways through the use of a part-time study skills adviser. Study skills advice takes two forms, including general workshops at the beginning of each term and individualised advice from the study skills adviser. However, students feel that the support needs to be better integrated into their programmes. Students also feel that informal study skills support was good, but are conscious that workshops for first-year students in particular, which were provided in Queen's on study skills, essay writing and balancing workloads, were not formally replicated in BISC. The panel feel that it is desirable for BISC to improve the communication and coordination of opportunities for developing independent learning and study skills at all stages of the students' studies at BISC.

2.13 Feedback suggests that informal support for students where English is their second language is generally good, but there is a need for more formalised support for this group of students. The panel feel that it is desirable for BISC to formalise arrangements for the support of students with English as a second language and capture good practice.

2.14 Queen's also provide support to first-year students returning from BISC to Canada. This is intended to help them with the transition to their second year in a much larger institution, where they will be in significantly larger classes and where teaching styles may be different to those experienced at BISC.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.15 Staff are undergoing diversity training provided by Queen's and training in the use of the virtual learning environment, and have received other training requested or identified. Members of the support staff have undertaken relevant training in London and small grants are available for conference attendance. There is an effective and supportive induction process for new staff when they first join BISC and a mentoring programme has recently been introduced. Peer observation is starting to be introduced which will help to identify staff development needs. In addition, members of staff have the opportunity to visit Queen's, and to work with visiting Queen's faculty.

How effectively does the provider ensure that students have access to learning resources that are sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes?

2.16 The BISC overview report on student evaluations identifies that students are asked to evaluate study space, library facilities, opening hours, and classroom and computing facilities. Students registered high levels of satisfaction in all of these areas and also indicated general satisfaction with the library. They also have access to Queen's (or their home institutions') online resources at the University of Sussex library. The BISC library includes publications tailored to their own courses so that it is well suited to their needs, despite its limited size. Students did, however, raise concerns about internet access. Senior management assured the panel that BISC planned to increase bandwidth in the very near future.

2.17 BISC is looking to promote a more autonomous quality assurance culture and have clear policy statements. They also wish to encourage students to be more involved in formal processes and to empower staff to play a deliberative oversight role in learning opportunities. The scrutiny panel would encourage BISC in implementing these enhancements.

The panel has **confidence** that Bader International Study Centre is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

3 Public information

How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.1 Day-to-day content of the BISC website is handled by BISC under the oversight of Queen's. BISC staff at Queen's are responsible for monitoring partner websites to ensure accuracy of information about BISC. Some BISC staff, when recruiting students from other partners abroad, will also check that partner's website for accuracy. The scrutiny panel found some examples of out-of-date information about a BISC summer programme on partner websites, although up-to-date information was also included. This would suggest that a more formal process needs to be put in place by BISC to ensure information is accurate, and that out-of-date material is removed to avoid any risk of confusion. The scrutiny panel feel that it is desirable for BISC to take a proactive role in communicating with Queen's in respect of information about BISC held on external websites so that out-of-date information is promptly removed.

3.2 BISC is primarily responsible for in-house intranet, pre-arrival information and orientation materials, and any other information given to students while studying at BISC, with regular support from Queen's staff. Students that met the scrutiny panel felt that the information on the internet was an accurate reflection of the reality of BISC and that all the relevant information was contained in the student handbook. They welcomed the inclusion of the syllabus on the BISC intranet.

The panel concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that Bader International Study Centre is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

4 Action plan

Bader International Study Centre action plan relating to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight, March 2012						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the level and openness of engagement between senior management and the student community, and its contribution to the management of the student experience (paragraph 2.3). 	Make sure Town Hall Meetings are held at least once a term and as necessary; minutes taken and actions considered	Scheduled into the term schedule	Project Manager	Events held, minutes maintained, actions taken	Senior Operations Team (SOT) and Board of Trustees	Board of Trustees and SOT review
	Annual student presentation to Board of Trustees (BoT)	Each March BoT meeting	Secretary of BoT	Formal presentation held; BoT responding to student concerns	Minutes	BoT
	Regular meetings between Executive Director (ED) and Student Council	Meetings scheduled twice a term	ED's PA	Meetings held and Student Council feel that their concerns are heard	Student Council to Student body	BISC Evaluation forms

Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel considers that it is advisable for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> respond to and learn from external reviews, for instance the review of teaching by the Queen's Centre for Teaching and Learning (paragraph 2.4). 	Have the Academic Director audit all past external reviews, collate recommendations, and consider them in Senior Operations Team meeting for action	December 2012	Academic Director	Completed review and agreed action points	BoT	BoT upon report from ED and AD
	Gain external review by External Review Committee of Strategic Plan for Academic Programme	December 2012	Academic Director	Completed review and agreed action points	ED, Curriculum Committee and BoT	ED, Curriculum Committee and BoT
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel considers that it is desirable for the Provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to embed and monitor the introduction of grade descriptors and the grading scheme to aid consistency in assessment and student understanding of 	Curriculum Committee (CC) to oversee faculty syllabi; students clearly told in all classes the expectations for assessment and marking	Beginning of each term	Academic Director	Students review expectations in all modules; CC review all syllabi each term	ED	ED review

expectations (paragraph 1.6)						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to embed and implement the range of new initiatives introduced by BISC, for example the Curriculum Committee (paragraphs 1.7, 1.9 and 2.15) 	Regular minutes and meetings of the Curriculum Committee, a new Research Committee of the Faculty, and a new regular Faculty Meeting	October 2012	Academic Director	Meetings held, minutes archived, actions agreed, actions fulfilled	ED and BoT	ED and BoT review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formalise arrangements for the support of students with English as a second language and capture good practice (paragraph 2.12) 	<p>Establish ESL advising process, staff and hours</p> <p>Prepare materials for new teaching staff orientation</p>	<p>September 2012</p> <p>September 2012</p>	<p>ED</p> <p>Academic Director</p>	<p>Staff in office seeing students and expressions of appreciation from students</p> <p>New faculty with reduced learning curve</p>	<p>SOT and BoT</p> <p>ED</p>	<p>End-of-term self-evaluation and review by SOT</p> <p>SOT</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve the communication and coordination of opportunities for developing independent learning and study skills at all stages of students' studies at BISC (paragraph 2.13) 	<p>Put BISC Student Charter centrally into orientation and into student contract to be signed</p> <p>Establish Academic Skills Office with staff and regular office hours and workshops;</p>	<p>September 2012</p> <p>September 2012</p>	<p>Student Services Manager</p> <p>ED</p>	<p>Greater student recognition of Charter</p> <p>Staff offering regular schedule of workshops and skills sessions</p>	<p>ED</p> <p>SOT and BoT</p>	<p>SOT</p> <p>End-of-term self-evaluation and review by SOT</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take a proactive role in communicating 	Hire a web master to regularly update and	December 2012	ED	Reduced discrepancies	ED	BoT

with Queen's University in respect of information about BISC held on websites so that out-of-date information is promptly removed (paragraph 3.1).	monitor all web presence Regular audit of partner websites and published materials	December 2012	Admissions Director in Kingston	among various platforms Report to ED	SOT	BoT
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Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. For more details see the [handbook](#)³ for this review method.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx

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